

Dear Mr. Guenther:

Thank you for your statement made before the Mississippi River Commission during the public meeting held in St. Louis, Missouri, on August 15, 2003. In your statement you specifically addressed issues relative to the Upper Mississippi River-Illinois Waterway (UMR-IWW) System Navigation Feasibility Study and the Missouri River Master Manual.

The UMR-IWW System Navigation Study has been restructured to give equal consideration to fish and wildlife resources and navigation improvement planning consistent with recommendations from the National Research Council and the Federal Principals Group. The primary goals are to reduce or eliminate commercial traffic delays and improve the national and regional economic conditions, while restoring, protecting, and enhancing the environment. The study team continues to work very closely with the basin stakeholders to ensure the development of a balanced set of tentative alternative plans. Please refer to the study website (<http://www2.mvr.usace.army.mil/umr-iwwsns/>), especially the "Newsletter and Status Reports" section, for regular study updates and additional clarification on a number of study topics and issues. The full economic and environmental evaluations necessary to support a potential recommendation for construction of navigation improvements and implementation of ecosystem restoration measures were completed in October 2003. These tentative alternative plans were presented at a series of public meetings in October 2003 (see latest Newsletter for dates, times, and locations) in order to gain public input prior to making a final recommendation. The final feasibility report is currently scheduled for completion in 2004.

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Regarding the Missouri River Master Water Control Plan, the Corps has not identified a preferred plan. The Commission has received testimony and correspondence expressing concern about proposed modifications and the potential for resulting low flows on the Mississippi River. The Corps' objective in its Missouri River operations is to implement a water control plan that meets the contemporary needs of the Missouri River Basin, serves the Congressionally authorized project purposes, complies with environmental laws including the Endangered Species Act, and fulfills responsibilities to Federally recognized Tribes. There are a myriad of complex operational and resource management issues.

Upriver interests want high, stable lake levels to address recreation, irrigation, and hydropower needs. Environmental interests seek a hydrograph that more closely approximates the natural hydrograph of the Missouri River. Downriver interests (below the dams) support different flow regimes for commercial navigation, flood protection, municipal water supply, and thermal generation.

The Corps is currently engaged in examining adjustments to the Modified Conservation Plan (MCP) and is conducting numerous model runs that eliminate the "fixed trigger" and "negative storage check" features of the MCP. Modeling of these adjustments to the MCP was requested by the Missouri River Basin Association (MRBA) and includes the concerns expressed by the State of Missouri. The MRBA has indicated they have no objection to modification of the MCP alternative to eliminate these features, provided the drought storage target of 42.7 million acre-feet for a drought similar to the one experienced in the 1980's as defined in its original 1999 recommendation.

The Commission appreciates receiving your comments and will be pleased to hear from you at our future public meetings.

Sincerely,

Don T. Riley
Brigadier General, U.S. Army
President Designee, Mississippi
River Commission